

Dreams And Media : Massurrealism's Quiet Legacy

*A niche 1990's art movement
that was ahead of its time—
and hinted at the future of
contemporary art.*

Brianna Aaronson
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Above photo: James Seehafer, Berlin Germany.

In the late 20th century, as the digital age began to reshape society, an art genre flickered into existence: massurrealism, coined by artist James Seehafer. Blending the dreamlike absurdity of surrealism with the pervasive imagery of mass media, massurrealism explored the intersection of consumer culture, digital technology, and surreal art forms. While it didn't achieve widespread recognition during its time, this group's critique of media saturation and its experimentation with the classic and electronic art forms feel more relevant today, as we live in a world shaped by social media algorithms and digital marketing.

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Origins in New England and the East Village of New York City

Seehafer grew up in New England, the son of an advertising professor, and was immersed in the world of visual culture from an early age. By the 1980s, he found himself in Manhattan's Lower East Side, a vibrant countercultural hub, where he exhibited alongside artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. It was here, amidst the gritty energy of the East Village art scene, that Seehafer's fascination with consumer culture began to take root. These formative experiences led him to create massurrealism as an art movement in 1992, drawing inspiration from surrealism, Pop Art, and the growing influence of mass media. Massurrealism emerged at a time when the art world was still coming to terms with the implications of digital technology. Massurrealism, at its core, merges surrealism with mass media, using digital tools to critique consumer culture—a fusion that resonates with themes in post-internet art. Seehafer's shopping cart collages exemplify this fusion, challenging viewers to rethink technology's role in art. These early works, exhibited in small galleries in Connecticut and Boston, laid the foundation, inspiring a dedicated community of artists and enthusiasts.

What sets massurrealism apart from other trends was its embrace of technology at a time when the art world was still grappling with the consequences of the internet. In 1996 Seehafer established massurrealism.com (now massurrealism.org), where he presented his works and ideas, and in turn began to pique the interest of other artists. This ultimately led to other artists of the massurreal style to be showcased. This digital platform allowed the them to exist beyond the physical confines of galleries, anticipating the ways in which the internet would reshape how we create, view, and consume art. These early efforts enabled these artists to develop without institutional support, fostered a dynamic underground presence that still inspires niche communities.

Massurrealism's Legacy and Influence

Seehafer, a reclusive figure whose absence adds intrigue to his work, and remained largely absent from social media. His disappearance deepened the genre's mystique, and his work became the subject of speculation and interest among those familiar with its existence. Despite this, massurrealism's influence can still be felt in certain niche art communities, particularly in the realms of digital and internet art and various places, such as the collaborative notSKY art project in Germany, and a photo collage of Seehafer's in the permanent collection at the prestigious Café Tortoni in Buenos Aires, Argentina. These small but notable instances hinted at the its international reach, even if its primary impact remained on the margins of the art world.

While massurrealism may not have been fully appreciated in its time, its themes resonate today more than ever. As we find ourselves living in an algorithm-driven world, with mass media and digital technology shaping nearly every aspect of our lives, the critiques of media manipulation and consumerism that Seehafer's work and those in the massurrealist group feel quite relevant. In many ways, the works these artists and the themes they explore of commercial culture have become more timely as the internet continues to influence our perceptions, identities, and interactions. In hindsight, we can see how massurrealism anticipated many aspects of the post-internet art movement, which explores the ways in which digital spaces have become both tools of self-expression and mechanisms of corporate control. Artists working today often use nostalgia and digital disorientation to comment on how technology shapes modern life. Massurrealism's understated influence offers something unique for those willing to look beyond the surface of contemporary digital art. The contribution of Seehafer and the other massurrealists, though modest in its initial presentation, offers a glimpse into the future of art in an age dominated by technology. It invites rediscovery for those who are willing to engage with its surreal yet pressing critiques of consumerism, technology, and digital life. In many ways, it represents an early attempt to make sense of the shifting



Above: James Seehafer *Untitled 1990*
SFX photography, digital collage.

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www.massurrealism.org



www.notsky.de



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cultural landscape that we now find ourselves in, where the line between art, commerce, and technology is increasingly blurred. While the origins of Massurrealism are closely tied to Seehafer's early experiments in the 1990s, this initiative was never intended to remain a one-man endeavor. From its earliest moments online—particularly through the launch of massurrealism.com in 1996—the aesthetic began to attract artists from across the globe. This modest but growing network helped shape Massurrealism into more than just a personal style: it became a loosely connected, resonant community of visual language. Unlike traditional groups centralized by galleries or manifestos, Massurrealism spread organically, facilitated by the early internet's open structure. Artists from Germany, the UK, Latin America, and the United States found in it a flexible framework for exploring themes like media saturation, digital alienation, irony, and consumer absurdity—often through hybrid techniques that combined analog and digital processes.

Though many of these artists have remained outside the spotlight, their engagement helped expand massurrealism's scope. They contributed photography, collage, animation, painting, and poetic or conceptual works that echoed Massurrealism's key questions: How do we make sense of the surreal in a hypermediated world? Where does the self exist within algorithmic culture? This network, while never formally organized, shared a sensibility rather than a doctrine. Its lack of rigid structure reflected its postmodern DNA. Each artist interpreted Massurrealism through their own lens, making it a living, adaptive concept rather than a fixed school of thought. Today, Massurrealism exists not as a centralized institution but as a diffuse presence—one that parallels many of the concerns found in digital and post-internet art. Its early embrace of web-based sharing, its collage of cultural codes, and its fusion of human emotion with mediated imagery align with broader artistic explorations of the digital condition.

Massurrealism highlights how art can travel to unlikely places, where a small obscure art group that wrestled with questions we now take for granted: How does media shape our reality? What happens when art meets technology? These ideas, which were niche in the 1990s, resonate more today as we navigate social media algorithms and digital culture. The event also sheds light on Seehafer himself who stepped back from public life after the early 2000s, leaving it as a discreet footprint. His work, with its odd blend of humor and critique, feels like a time capsule of the pre-internet-to-Web-2.0 transition. For those curious about art's weirder corners, this era is definitely unique. Though it is a footnote in art history, it's a compelling one. It reminds us that even in rigid cultural landscapes, there's room for the unexpected—an artist, a strange new movement, a brief moment of curiosity. If you're intrigued by art that's off the beaten path, the massurrealists are worth a closer look—there's a story there, waiting to be uncovered. •



Above: A photo collage by James Seehafer in the collection of Cafe Tortoni in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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<http://massurrealist.com/>

<http://massurrealism.ch/>

<http://massurrealism.spb.ru/>

<http://massurrealism.co.uk/>

<http://massurrealism.nyc.ny.us/>

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